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No. 14

REVISED EDITION.

THE WORK OF LIBERALISM SINCE THE GREAT REFORM ACT

A SUMMARY OF POLITICAL HISTORY,

1832—1902.

LIBERAL PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT,

42, PARLIAMENT STREET, LONDON, S.W.

1903.

PRICE ONE PENNY

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THE WORK OF LIBERALISM SINCE THE REFORM ACT, 1832-1902.

I.—A GENERAL REVIEW.

Of the 70 years that have passed since the opening of the first reformed Parliament in January, 1833, 40 have been years of Liberal Government, and 30 of Conservative Government. If a line is drawn in 1886, the year of the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill, the proportion is still more striking, the Liberal years numbering 36½, the Conservative years only 16½. It may thus be claimed with justice that the Victorian era, in which the country made unexampled advances in wealth, knowledge, morality and Imperial power, as well as in every sort of political and social reform, has been in the main an era of Liberal administration. The Liberal party has had practically unfettered control of the interests of the country in foreign, colonial, and financial policy. That control has, at any rate, not been inconsistent with the consolidation of a great world-wide empire, and with an absolutely unparalleled expansion of trade and commerce. In domestic policy the Liberal party has only been allowed to carry its principles into legislation in so far as it has been enabled by circumstances to impose its will upon the House of Lords, and the history of its triumphs has been equally a history of the failures and rebuffs of that institution.

The Liberal Government which passed the Reform Act came into power at the close of 70 years' practically unbroken Tory supremacy, and at once set to work to reduce the immense arrears of reform which that supremacy had created. The reforming activity of the Liberal party

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immediately after 1832 was consequently more prolific and comprehensive than that attained at any subsequent period, except perhaps Mr. Gladstone's great ministry of 1868 to 1874.

First Period of Liberal Ascendancy (1833-1841).

This period was only once interrupted for the space of four months, in 1835, by the unconstitutional action of William IV. in dismissing Lord Melbourne, and the futile effort of Sir Robert Peel to carry on the Government with a Tory Ministry. Through the whole course of its existence the Government was engaged in an intermittent contest with the House of Lords. The Liberal Prime Ministers were Lord Grey and Lord Melbourne. Lord John Russell led the House of Commons from 1834 (succeeding Lord Althorp, who then became Earl Spencer). Foreign affairs were in the hands of Lord Palmerston. Mr. (afterwards Lord) Macaulay was a prominent member of the Liberal Ministry.

In its first session the Liberal Government passed the following measures.

1. *Abolition of Slavery* (with compensation of £20,000,000 to the slave owners).

2. *An Act Reforming the Irish Church* (suppressing two Archbishoprics and eight Bishoprics and making provision for the application of surplus revenues).

3. *An Act making the first grant in aid of Elementary Education.*

4. *The first important Factory Act** (prohibiting the employment of children under nine years of age and that of women and young persons for more than 12 hours a day).

* Originally introduced by Lord Ashley (Lord Shaftesbury), and, having been dropped by him (owing to his dissatisfaction at certain amendments introduced by the House of Commons), taken up and carried through by the Government.

5. *A Bill removing Jewish Disabilities* (passed by the Commons but rejected by the Lords and so for several successive years till 1858).

In 1834 the Government attacked the question of the Poor Law, the administration of which had long been a grave national scandal. The old law had practically put a premium upon low wages and illegitimacy, and the rates under it had reached £8,000,000 annually, The new law grouped the parishes in unions, confined relief to cases of destitution, and forbade out door relief to the able bodied. It is still the basis of our Poor Law system.

In 1835, after ousting the transitory Government of Sir Robert Peel, the Liberals again returned to power under Lord Melbourne.

The legislative measures carried by Lord Melbourne's Ministry were as follows:—

1. *The Municipal Reform Act*, substituting the present system of Town Councils for the corrupt, and oligarchical corporations of the old régime. The Lords introduced a number of amendments eradicating all its most democratic provisions, but with a few unimportant exceptions they were all struck out by the Commons.

A corresponding Irish Act was passed by the House of Commons in five successive years, but was so mutilated by the Lords that it was four times abandoned, only passing in 1840 in a very attenuated form.

2. *The Irish Tithe Act*, substituting a charge on the land for direct tithes. (This Act, as it contained a clause known as the "Appropriation Clause," partially disendowing the Irish Church, was twice blocked by the Lords, and only passed by them in 1838, when the clause was dropped by the Government to get the Bill passed.)

3. *A Marriage Act* allowing Dissenters to celebrate their marriages in their own chapels.

4. *The Establishment of the Penny Post* (part of the Budget scheme of 1839).

5. *An Act Granting Parliamentary Home Rule to Canada* (which effectually put an end to Canadian discontent).

Sir Robert Peel's Ministry.

The only considerable break in Liberal ascendancy until Mr. Disraeli's Ministry of 1874-80, was Sir Robert Peel's great Ministry of 1841-1846. Its policy gradually assumed such a Liberal character that Mr. Disraeli, who did not belong to it, said of Peel in 1844 (two years before the repeal of the Corn Laws) that he "had caught the Whigs bathing and walked away with their clothes," and denounced his Government as "an organised hypocrisy." Its members (with one or two exceptions) subsequently formed the nucleus of the Peelite party, and most of them, in particular Mr. Gladstone, finally became Liberals. Sir Robert Peel began the policy of gradually reducing the numberless protective duties which were such a burden on industry, and finally in 1846, under the pressure of the crisis caused by the Irish famine, abolished the duty on corn itself.

It was during this Ministry that the Liberal party as a whole identified itself with the cause of the absolute repeal of the Corn Laws. Lord Melbourne's Ministry in 1841 before its fall had declared itself in favour of substituting a small fixed duty, instead of the heavy graduated duty, varying with the price. The leading Free-traders, hitherto, had been Lord Grey, and Messrs. C. P. Villiers, Bright, and Cobden—all Liberals. When Peel discovered that the repeal of the Corn Laws was inevitable he resigned, and it was only due to the accident that Lord Grey refused to serve in the same Ministry

as Lord Palmerston (owing to the fact that he disagreed with the principles of his foreign policy) that the repeal of the Corn Laws was not carried through by a Liberal Ministry. Lord John Russell being unable, owing to this circumstance, to form a Ministry, Sir Robert Peel resumed office and carried repeal by means of Liberal votes, in the teeth of the obstruction of his infuriated followers,* who finally succeeded in driving him from office by a defeat on an Irish Coercion Bill, with whose principles they were really in hearty agreement. For the remainder of his life he gave a general support to the Liberal Government which succeeded him.

Second Period of Liberal Ascendancy.

What may be described as the second period of Liberal ascendancy began with Lord John Russell's Ministry of 1847, and lasted, with intervals, till 1866. It was twice interrupted by short Conservative Ministries, in 1852 and 1858, and from 1852 to 1855 the country was governed by the Ministry of Lord Aberdeen, which, though a Liberal and Peelite coalition, may be considered as a Liberal Ministry.

The main work of this period was financial and its due progress was, of course, seriously interfered with by the Crimean War. Lord John Russell's Ministry, too, had

* See "Greville Memoirs" May 21st, 1846. "Last week the debate in the House of Commons came to a close at last, wound up by a speech of Disraeli's, very clever, in which he hacked and mangled Peel with the most unsparing severity, and positively tortured his victim. It was a miserable and degrading spectacle. The whole mass of the Protectionists cheered him with vociferous delight, making the roof ring again, and when Peel spoke they screamed and hooted at him in the most brutal manner. When he vindicated himself and talked of honour and conscience they assailed him with shouts of derision and gestures of contempt. Such treatment, in the House of Commons, where for years he had been an object of deference and respect, nearly overcame him."

to deal with the terrible distress caused by the Irish famine, to re-organise the Irish Poor Law system, and to concert measures for the emigration of the surplus population.

The financial task of Lord John Russell's Government was to consolidate and extend the financial revolution inaugurated by Sir Robert Peel, and his chief-lieutenant, Mr. Gladstone. This task left little scope for any comprehensive measures, except the Repeal of the Navigation Laws. The supposed object of the Navigation Laws was to protect British shipping, and the condition of British shipping to-day is an eloquent testimony to the wisdom of their abolition. When Lord John Russell left office in 1852, the policy of Free-trade had been so amply vindicated that the new protectionist government accepted a resolution declaring that it should be "firmly maintained and prudently extended."

In the cause of **religious equality** the Russell Ministry renewed the attempt to remove the Parliamentary disabilities of the Jews, but were, as usual, thwarted by the House of Lords. It also rendered the empire a great and lasting service by passing the Australian Colonies Bill of 1850, which granted Parliamentary Home Rule to the various Colonies, and settled the basis of our present colonial empire.

Lord Derby's Ministry of 1852 only lasted from February to December. It was succeeded by Lord Aberdeen's coalition Ministry, in which Mr. Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer. The two things for which this Ministry will be remembered are the Crimean War, and Mr. Gladstone's Budget of 1853. This budget is a landmark in financial history. It denoted the definite extension of the policy of Free-trade (which, with the exception of the repeal of the Corn Law, had been hitherto devoted to the removal of the fetters upon industry) to measures for the relief of the masses by the abolition of the duties on articles of popular use and consumption. It remitted taxation to the extent of £5,000,000,

and established in its stead a new source of national income by extending the Succession Duties to real property (a reform which reached its culmination in Sir William Harcourt's "Finance Act" of 1894).

The coalition Ministry again passed the Jewish Disabilities Bill which was again rejected by the House of Lords.

In 1855 Lord Aberdeen was succeeded by Lord Palmerston, who brought the Crimean War to a conclusion He remained in office till 1859, but the country was so absorbed in the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, and China War which immediately followed it, that there is little to record in the way of domestic legislation, beyond the final abolition of the tax on newspapers in 1855.

After another stop gap Conservative Ministry Parliament was dissolved in 1859, and Lord Palmerston once more returned to power at the head of a strong Liberal Ministry, Mr. Gladstone being Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lord John Russell Foreign Minister. This Ministry was the sphere of Mr. Gladstone's greatest financial triumphs. His budgets disclosed a succession of surpluses. With the help of Mr. Cobden he negotiated a Commercial Treaty with France in 1860. In the same year he attempted to abolish the paper duty. He was thwarted by the House of Lords, but in the following year secured his purposes, and established the rights of the House of Commons by embodying all his financial proposals in one Bill. In the following year he reduced the tea duty to 1s. a pound, and, finally, in 1865, to 6d. Besides reducing the tea duty he swept the tariff clear of almost all the duties on necessary articles of common consumption, while, at the same time, he steadily raised the duties on spirits. Between 1853 (Mr. Gladstone's first Chancellorship) and 1866 the balance of remissions of taxation amounted to £13,000,000. Mr. Gladstone, at the same time, though great sums were—at the instance of Lord Palmerston—spent on

national defence, reduced the annual expenditure from £39,502,000 in 1860, and £72,792,000 in 1861, to £35,914,000 in 1866, and left the income tax at 4d. in the £.

On the death of Lord Palmerston in 1865, Lord John Russell (now Earl Russell) became Prime Minister, and in the first session of the new Parliament which followed his death, Mr. Gladstone, as leader of the House of Commons, introduced the Reform Bill of 1866.

This was the first really serious attempt to deal with the Reform Question since the Act of 1832. That measure may be said to have transferred the government of the country from the aristocracy to the middle classes. The object of the present measure was to enfranchise in a considerable degree the working men of the towns. Owing to the desertion of a section of the Liberal party, the Bill only passed its second reading by a majority of five votes, and the Government was finally defeated on an important amendment in Committee. They thereupon resigned, and Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli assumed office.

The Conservative Government of 1866-1868.

The only thing for which this Government will be remembered in history is the complete *volte-face* of the Conservative party on the subject of Reform. The fate of the Liberal Reform Bill had thoroughly roused the country, and a series of popular demonstrations, the most important of which was the one that destroyed the Hyde Park railings on July 23rd, 1866, made it clear that no Government could exist which did not set itself to deal with the question. It must be remembered too that, in spite of the defection of the Adullamites, the House of Commons was still a Liberal House of Commons, and that Mr. Disraeli could only hope to retain office by bowing to its will. Accordingly, in February, 1867—amid loud laughter—Mr. Disraeli announced

that "in the opinion of the Government, Parliamentary Reform should no longer be a question which ought to decide the fate of Ministries." The Government at first proposed to proceed by way of resolutions—but, as the House of Commons and the country plainly repudiated all these resolutions as soon as they were announced, they obediently withdrew them. Meanwhile they had prepared two Bills, one a comparatively comprehensive bill, the other a less comprehensive one, hurriedly put together, and known as the "ten minutes Bill." This latter they introduced into the House of Commons, but it received such general condemnation that it was immediately withdrawn, and the more comprehensive measure substituted in its place. This occasioned the resignation of three members of the Government, Lord Carnarvon, General Peel, and Lord Cranborne (now Lord Salisbury). The measure so introduced was based upon the principle of household suffrage in the boroughs and a £15 rating in the counties. It contained a number of purely fancy and undemocratic provisions and disfranchised what was known as the "compound householder." In Committee Mr. Disraeli allowed the Liberal Opposition entirely to remodel the Bill. All the fancy and undemocratic provisions were cut out, and amendments were accepted, or carried against the Government by Liberal votes, more than quadrupling the number of persons enfranchised. In this form the Bill, described by Lord Derby as "a leap in the dark," and by the present Lord Salisbury as "a Conservative surrender," finally passed into law.

Some time was necessarily occupied in passing the Supplementary Reform Acts for Scotland and Ireland, in registering the new electorate and completing the arrangements for the redistribution of seats. Mr. Gladstone utilised this opportunity to declare war upon the Irish Church Establishment. Though still in opposition he carried resolutions declaring

that the time had come when the Irish Church should be disestablished and disendowed. He carried through the House of Commons a Bill which was rejected by the House of Lords, temporarily suspending the exercise of patronage in the Irish Church, and also carried through both Houses a Bill abolishing compulsory church rates, a grievance against which the Dissenters of the country had long protested.

When the general election came in November, 1868, the verdict of the country was unmistakeable, and Mr. Gladstone was swept into power with a majority of 72.

Mr. Gladstone's Ministry of 1868–1874.

The record of Mr. Gladstone's Ministry which now ensued is the most remarkable in the history of the century. The activity and comprehensiveness of its reforming zeal can only be paralleled by that of the Liberal Ministry which carried the Reform Bill of 1832.

The principal preoccupation of the Government was **Ireland.** The three abuses which Mr. Gladstone addressed himself to attack were the Irish Church Establishment, the Irish system of Land Tenure, and Irish University Education. In 1869 he successfully disestablished and disendowed the Irish Church. In 1870 he carried through a great reform of the Irish Land Laws (legalising the Ulster "Tenant Right" custom and giving tenants compensation for their improvements and for disturbance from their holdings), a work which he completed in 1881. In 1873 he introduced the Irish University Bill—but this, owing to the religious difficulties that enveloped the subject, proved fatal to the Government, and was defeated on the motion for its second reading by a majority of three.

The other measures carried into law by this Government only require to be catalogued for their importance to be realised.

1. *The Elementary Education Act*, 1870, establishing our present system of National Education.

2. *The Abolition of Religious Tests in Universities.*—This Bill having been twice rejected by the Lords was finally passed in 1871.

3. *The Ballot Act*, 1872.—This had been carried in the House of Commons in 1871, but was rejected by the Lords.

4. *The Abolition of Purchase in the Army.*—This was effected by Royal Warrant, the Lords having struck out the clause dealing with the subject in the Army Bill.

5. *The Legalisation of Trade Unions.*—For this, the Great Charter of Trade Unionism, see page 31.

6. *The Judicature Act*, 1873, reforming, simplifying and systematising the whole judicial system of the country.

This Government also **abolished the last remaining shilling duty on corn, threw open the great majority of appointments in the Civil Service to free competition, and rendered a great and distinguished service to international peace by referring the "Alabama" dispute with the United States to arbitration. The success of its financial policy was no less brilliant than that of its domestic legislation. Its total surpluses (mainly devoted to the remission of taxation) amounted to nearly £22,000,000, and when it retired from office it left the Income Tax at 2d. in the £.**

The Conservative Government of 1874–1880.

On the dissolution of Parliament in January, 1874, Mr. Disraeli came into power with a large majority. His was the first Conservative Government with a parliamentary majority since Sir Robert Peel broke up the Conservative party in 1846. It left no serious mark upon the domestic legislation of the

country, but from 1876 onward it fought a prolonged struggle with the Liberal party on the principles of Foreign Policy, which finally terminated in its overthrow in 1880.

In 1875 the misgovernment of the Porte produced a rebellion in the subject Christian provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and provoked European intervention. In the negotiations that ensued the British Government strongly supported the Turks Austria desired the Powers to take forcible measures to secure the good government of the revolting provinces. England was "not prepared to do more than offer such friendly advice as the circumstances seemed to require," and in consequence nothing was done. In the following May (1876) a similar insurrection in Bulgaria was put down with such revolting barbarity, that the whole of Europe was aroused. Mr. Disraeli characteristically attempted to minimise the atrocities. Mr. Gladstone left his temporary retirement and headed the agitation in the country, and public opinion forced the Government for the time being to abandon their strong pro-Turkish policy. A Conference of the European Powers at Constantinople having been without result in 1877, Russia, on behalf of the subject Christian population, declared war against Turkey. The successful conclusion of this war brought Russia, owing to the policy of Lord Beaconsfield, within measurable distance of war with England. In the peace negotiations, Lord Beaconsfield strongly identified himself with Turkey, and succeeded in greatly modifying the Treaty of San Stefano in favour of Turkey, and to the detriment of the populations affected by it. But for this action of Lord Beaconsfield, large tracts of territory, in which many of the recent Armenian atrocities occurred, would have been under the domination of Russia.

The principles of Liberal foreign policy which were developed by the events above referred to were mainly these :—

1. That England should do all in its power to liberate all subject Christian populations from Turkish rule.

2. That by such acts as the Bulgarian atrocities the Porte had put itself outside the pale of European civilisation.

3. That it would be criminal for England to engage in war with Russia in support of the Turkish power.

One of the indirect results of Lord Beaconsfield's Eastern policy was a disastrous and impolitic war with Afghanistan in 1879, the evil consequences of which were with difficulty neutralised by his successors.

The general election of 1880 was fought upon the subject of Lord Beaconsfield's foreign policy, Mr. Gladstone expounding the indictment against it in the famous speeches of his Midlothian Campaign. The election resulted in its complete condemnation and in the triumphant return of the Liberal party to power.

Mr. Gladstone's Ministry of 1880-1885.

Events from this time outward are so fresh in public recollection that they may be very briefly chronicled. The subject that again chiefly absorbed the attention of the Government was Ireland, and the various remedial and repressive measures which its condition necessitated. The principal legislative achievements of the Government were as follows:—

1. *The Irish Land Act*, 1881, supplementing and completing the Act of 1870 and giving the Irish tenant the right to have his rent fixed by law.

2. *The Employers Liability Act*, 1880, restricting the doctrine of "common employment," and allowing workmen to avail themselves of a special county court procedure for the recovery of their rights.

3. *The Ground Game Act*, 1880, amending the Game Laws

so as to enable farmers to secure their crops from the depredations of hares and rabbits.

4. *The Burials Act*, 1880, authorising Nonconformist burial services in parochial graveyards.

5. *The Agricultural Holdings Act*, 1883, immensely improving the position of tenants at the end of their tenancies.

6. *The Franchise Act*, 1884, assimilating the County and Borough Franchise and extending the franchise to the agricultural labourer.

7. *The Corrupt Practices Act*, which enormously reduced the corruption at Parliamentary Elections.

In June, 1885, the Government was defeated on the Budget, and Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister.

1885 to Present Time.

The elections of 1885, while they resulted, as far as Great Britain was concerned, in a substantial Liberal majority, showed an overwhelming majority in Ireland in favour of Home Rule. Mr. Gladstone, accordingly, having returned to power, in the first month of the new Parliament determined to give effect to the Irish demand, and introduced the Home Rule Bill of 1886. The Bill was defeated by the secession of the Liberal Unionists. The country endorsed the vote of the House of Commons, and since that year, except from 1892 to 1895, the country has been under a Conservative Government.

To the credit of the Conservative Government during this period must be set these measures :—

1. *The Local Government Act* of 1888, establishing County Councils, and the *Irish Local Government Act*, 1898.

2. *The Free Education Act* of 1891, which was in direct contradiction of their previous pledges. It was probably introduced in view of the pending General Election. In the division on the second reading the majority of the votes in favour of it were given by Liberals.

3. *The Workmen's Compensation Act*, 1897,—A partial measure, and (despite the promises of Mr. Chamberlain) a litigious one.

4. *The Licensing Act*, 1902.—A measure for the prevention of drunkenness and regulation of clubs.

To its discredit must be set :—

1. *The Irish Coercion Act*, 1887, the most drastic and stringently administered Coercion Act of modern times.

2. *The Education Act*, 1897, handing over £600,000 of public money to sectarian schools, without securing the slightest local public control of its expenditure. (As to *Education Act*, 1902, see page 21.)

3. *The Agricultural Land Rating Acts*, 1896, giving the landed interests a yearly sum of £1,800,000—a "dole" renewed for four years in 1901.

On the other hand, the short Liberal Government of 1892 to 1895, besides carrying through the Commons the Home Rule Bill of 1893, and the Employers' Liability Bill of 1894 (both of which were rejected by the Lords), carried into law :—

1. *The Parish Councils Act*, 1894, the most democratic measure of local government ever passed.

2. *The Finance Act*, 1894, equalising the Death Duties upon real and personal property (see page 25).

3. *The Railway Regulation Act*, 1893, regulating the hours of labour of railway servants.

To these must be added the *Factory Act*, 1895, which, though passed by a Conservative, was introduced by a Liberal Government, and the revolution in vigour and efficiency which Mr. Asquith, at the Home Office, and Mr. Acland, at the Education office, infused into the administration of their departments. A further *Factory Act* was passed in 1901 by the Tory Government, from which the laundries clause was excluded, the Government giving way to Irish Nationalist pressure.

II.—POPULAR GOVERNMENT.

Mr. Gladstone once defined Liberalism as "trust in the people qualified by prudence," and Toryism as "distrust in the people qualified by fear." Perhaps the chief work of the Liberal party has been to transfer the government of the country, both nationally and locally, from the hands of privileged classes into the hands of the people at large. In so far that the United Kingdom is to-day a democracy, the credit is due to the Liberal party.

The first step in this process was the Reform Act of 1832 —which lies outside the scope of this pamphlet. Suffice it to say it put an end to rotten boroughs, extended the franchise in the counties, and made the £10 householder the basis of the franchise in the towns. It comprised a general redistribution of seats, and its effect was to take the House of Commons out of the control of the aristocracy.

The next step was the reform of the Municipal Corporations in 1835. Until this was accomplished municipal government was, throughout the country, in the hands of narrow, self-elected, corrupt oligarchies of freemen. The Bill was only carried after a severe struggle with the House of Lords, which introduced several undemocratic amendments, all of which were modified or struck out by the House of Commons.

Further Reform Bills were introduced by Lord John Russell in 1852 and 1860, but as the country did not appear to be ripe for them they were not proceeded with.

In 1859 Mr. Disraeli introduced a Conservative Reform Bill. It was frankly undemocratic, and contained a number of fancy franchises It was rejected by the House of Commons.

The history of the Reform Bill of 1866, introduced by Mr. Gladstone, and the Reform Act of 1867, introduced by Mr. Disraeli, has been already related. (See pp. 8, 9.) As, however, the Conservatives frequently claim credit for the Reform Act of 1867 it may be desirable to draw further attention to the following facts.

Until 1867 the Conservatives never professed themselves in favour of democratic principles. On the contrary Mr. Disraeli always maintained that "the Commons of England should be a privileged order and not an indiscriminate multitude." * On the other hand Mr. Gladstone, in 1864, laid down the broad Liberal principle as follows:—

> "I venture to state that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution."

The Liberal Reform Bill of 1866 was denounced by Mr. Disraeli as an attempt to "Americanise our institutions." The main ground of the opposition of the Conservative party was the unfitness of the working classes to exercise the franchise, and their ideas were most concisely expressed by

---

* See his speech on the Bill of 1859. "If you establish democracy you must in due season reap the fruit of democracy. You will have in due season reduction of the public burdens and increase of the public expenditure. . . . You may find your property less valuable and, perhaps, your freedom less complete. . . . You cannot encounter [these arguments] by sentimental descriptions of the good qualities of the working classes. The greater their qualities the greater the danger, if you will lay down the principle that they are to enter the constituent body not as individuals but as the multitude."

See also his speech in 1873. ["The question is] whether the Commons of England shall remain an estate of the realm, numerous and privileged, but qualified, or whether they should degenerate into an indiscriminate multitude,"

Mr. Robert Lowe, one of the "Adullamites," whose speeches won their warmest applause.*

The Reform Act of 1867 was wrung from Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli partly by the popular agitation, and partly by the necessity of their submitting to a Liberal House of Commons in order to retain office.

As originally introduced it contained the following provisions:—

1. **A two years' residence qualification.**
2. **An education franchise.**
3. **A professional franchise.**
4. **A savings bank franchise.**
5. **A franchise based upon the payment of direct taxation.**
6. **A dual vote, where such franchises were combined.**

The whole of these were struck out by the Liberal party, who at the same time effected the following further alterations:—

1. **The introduction of a £10 lodger franchise.**
2. **The reduction of the country franchise from £15 to £10.**
3. **The abolition of the "compound householder" (which enormously swelled the number of persons enfranchised).**
4. **A revision of the arrangements for the redistribution of seats.**

* See a passage in one of his speeches which excited great comment at the time:—"You have had the opportunity of knowing some of the constituencies of this country, and I ask if you want venality, ignorance, drunkenness, and the means of intimidation; if you want impulsive, unreflecting and violent people, where will you go to look for them, to the top or the bottom? . . . We know what sort of persons live in these small houses."

In this form the Bill finally passed, and it is small wonder that it was described by the present Lord Salisbury as a "Conservative surrender."*

The final stages in the completion of the work of popular government were as follows:—

1. *The Ballot Act.*—This was bitterly opposed by the Conservative party, thrown out by the Lords in 1871, and only carried after a severe struggle in 1872.

2. *The Franchise Act*, 1885,† equalising the country and borough franchise and conferring votes upon over 2,000,000 electors.‡

3. *The Local Government Act*, 1888, establishing County Councils. This was the work of a Conservative Government, but the necessary sequel of the Franchise Act of 1885.

4. *The Local Government Act*, 1894, establishing a Parish Council (or Meeting) on democratic lines in every parish of the country. It was much mutilated by the House of Lords in Committee, but finally passed in what was mainly its original form.

* See his article in the *Quarterly Review*, 1867.

† This subject was annually pressed upon Parliament by Sir George Trevelyan under the Conservative Government of 1874-1880, but his motions were rejected by the Conservative party by large majorities: in 1874 by 287 to 73; in 1875 by 268 to 166; in 1876 by 264 to 165; in 1877 by 274 to 218; in 1878 by 271 to 219; and in 1879 by 291 to 226.

‡ In the same year was passed an Act extending the hours of polling from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., so as to enable the working classes to record their votes without sacrificing their day's work.

III.—RELIGIOUS EQUALITY.

Next to political liberty, religious equality has been the chief principle of the Liberal party and all the great measures in this direction have been due to its efforts.

Even before the Reform Bill the Liberal party had always fought for Catholic emancipation and in 1828 Lord John Russell succeeded in carrying through both Houses a Bill repealing the Test and Corporation Acts (which imposed religious tests on Dissenters who desired to fill offices in the state or in a municipality).

Immediately after the Reform Act the Liberal Government in 1833 proceeded to attack the questions of the Irish Tithes and Church. They proposed to transfer the burden of the tithe from the tenant to the landlord, and to appropriate part of the surplus revenues of the Irish Church (which only comprised an insignificant minority of the Irish people) to national purposes. In this latter plan they were, after a long struggle, thwarted by the House of Lords.

In 1833 they also passed through the House of Commons a Bill abolishing the political disabilities of Jews. The Lords threw out the Bill, year after year, and it was not till 1858 that a Jew was allowed to sit in the House of Commons.*

In 1836 they carried a Bill allowing Nonconformists to celebrate their marriages in their own chapels.

* In 1847, owing to Lord George Bentinck voting in favour of the Bill, the Conservative party conveyed to him "their keen sense of disapprobation." Lord George thereupon resigned his leadership of the Conservative party in the House of Commons, an office in which he succeeded Sir Robert Peel.

In 1837 they introduced a Bill for the abolition of Church rates (*i.e.*, rates levied for the support and repair of Churches), but the majority by which it was carried was so narrow as to make it hopeless to attempt to carry it through the Lords. It was, in subsequent years, several times carried by the Commons and rejected by the Lords, but was finally passed into law by Mr. Gladstone in 1868.

In 1869 the Liberal Government of Mr. Gladstone carried the great Act disestablishing and disendowing the Irish Church.

In the same year they carried an Act establishing religious equality in all the endowed schools of the country (except those specifically endowed on denominational lines).

In the same year they carried a third measure through the House of Commons, based upon the same principle—a Bill abolishing religious tests at English Universities. It was thrown out by the Lords, and again in 1870, and only passed in 1871.

In 1880 the Liberal Government carried the Burials Act, allowing Dissenters to bury their own dead in parish graveyards with their own services.

In 1895 the Liberal Government introduced a Bill into the House of Commons for the Disestablishment of the English Church in Wales. This is a reform demanded by an overwhelming majority of the Welsh people, who for the most part belong to other denominations. The Bill was then lost owing to the defeat of the Liberal Government on another question.

For many years past the Liberal party has been engaged in a struggle with the Conservative party on the subject of the (so-called) Voluntary schools. These contain more than half the school children of the country, and belong chiefly to one denomination. In many cases they have been built by means of building grants furnished by the taxpayers of

the country. Up to 1902 five-sixths of their income was drawn from the public funds, whilst the schools were under no sort of local public control. The *Education Act* of 1902 gives further assistance to the denominational schools by allowing them to receive rate aid, although they are allowed to remain under denominational managers, with whom the appointment of teachers rests. The Board schools are at a stroke destroyed, the new local education authority being County and Borough Councils. It is impossible, in the short space that can be given here, to deal adequately with this measure, but summarily it must be said that the Act, by reason of its violation of sound constitutional principles and also on account of the methods adopted in carrying it through Parliament—where it was closured by compartments—can be no settlement of the education question, and the Liberal party stands pledged to work for such alteration in the law as will secure for the country a national system of education based on popular control and freed from religious tests and sectarian influences.

IV.—FINANCE.

The two great principles of Liberal finance have been :—

1. The removal of oppressive taxes, in particular the taxes upon food and articles of common use—with the object of lightening the burdens of the masses of the community.

2. The substitution of taxes, which fall upon those best able to bear them, in particular :—

(i.) The Succession Duties, 1853.

(ii.) The Equalisation and Graduation of the Death Duties, 1894.

I.—The Removal of Oppressive Taxes.

A. *The Repeal of the Corn Laws.*—This, though carried by Sir Robert Peel, was in reality a Liberal measure. It had been persistently advocated for many years by a body of Liberals, headed by Messrs. Cobden, Bright, and Villiers, and Lord Grey. It was only owing to the accident of a temporary disagreement between Lords Grey and Palmerston, which prevented Lord John Russell forming a Ministry, that it was not introduced by a Liberal Government. It was, as a matter of fact, carried by Liberal votes. The majority consisted of 227 Liberals and 112 Tories, and the minority of 11 Liberals and 231 Tories. The Tories never forgave Sir Robert Peel, who until his death gave a general support to the Liberal Ministry which succeeded him.

B. *The Soap Duty.*—This was first reduced by a half by the Liberal Ministry in 1833, and finally abolished by Mr. Gladstone in 1853. Its abolition meant, even in that year, an annual remission of £1,126,000.

C. *The Tea Duty.*—The gradual reduction of the tea duty was commenced by Mr. Gladstone in 1853. In that year it stood at about 2s. 2d. a pound. The process was interrupted by the Crimean War, but in 1863 Mr. Gladstone again reduced it to 1s. in the lb. (This meant a remission of £1,300,000.) In 1865 he further reduced it to 6d. in the lb. (This was a remission of £2,550,000.) The only share the Tories have had in the reduction of the tea duty was the reduction of 2d. in the lb. effected by Mr. Goschen.

D. *The Sugar Duty.*—The first great reduction of the sugar duty was by Mr. Gladstone in 1864 (a remission of £1,300,000). In 1870, the Liberal Government further reduced the duty by one-half (a remission of £2,750,000). In 1873, they again reduced it by a half (a remission of £1,430,000), and on leaving office in 1874, they bequeathed such an immense surplus to the Tories (£6,000,000) that the latter were enabled to abolish the remnant of the duty.

E. *Other Duties.*—The Liberals also effected the following reductions or abolitions of other duties:—

Abolition of the tax on Windows, 1851 (a remission of £1,130,000);

Abolition of the Paper duty, 1861 (a remission of £1,350,000);

Abolition of the tax on Newspapers, 1855 (a remission of £458,000);

Abolition of the 1s. duty on Corn, 1869 (a remission of £900,000);

Abolition of half the duties on Coffee, 1872 (a remission of £230,000);

Abolition of the tax on Malt, 1880 (a tax on beer, one far less oppressive to the farmers, being substituted);

and abolished the duties on (amongst others) the following articles: butter, cheese, eggs, oranges, lemons, nuts.

It must also be remembered that it was the Liberal Government of 1839 which established the penny post.

II.—The Substitution of Direct Taxes on the Propertied Classes.

The first great step in this direction was the extension of the succession duty to real and settled property by Mr Gladstone in 1853.

Sir Robert Giffen says of this measure:—

"The idea of calling in new aids to help in the work (*i.e.*, the relief of the tax-paying masses) was ever exclusively Mr. Gladstone's. It was like the discovery of a national estate, which had been appropriated to their own use by the individuals of a favoured class, and it secured to the country for all purposes a source of revenue peculiarly unobjectionable. By directing attention to new sources of income, Mr. Gladstone undoubtedly solved the problem of meeting the high expenditure of the years that were to come without stopping the work of reform. . . . Had no decisive remissions been made in 1853, had not the way to do so been discovered in spite of every obstacle, it is altogether doubtful when they would have been made."

The work thus began in 1853 was completed by Sir William Harcourt in his great budget of 1894. He finally put the taxation on landed property passing at death on exactly the same level as any other property, and thus abolished the utterly unfair privileges so long enjoyed by the landed classes. At the same time, by graduating the duties, that is to say, imposing heavier duties on estates as they increased in value, he threw the heaviest burden on the classes most able to bear it.

The two most prosperous periods in English financial history have been those of the Liberal Governments which

held office between 1859 and 1866, and between 1868 and 1874. Between 1859 and 1866 (during which time Mr. Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer) the Liberals were able to remit over £12,000,000 of taxation, and in Mr. Gladstone's Government of 1868 to 1874 the total surpluses amounted to nearly £22,000,000, thus :—

	£		£		£
1869 ...	3,350,000	1872 ...	3,500,000	1874 ...	6,000,000
1870 ...	4,350,000	1873 ...	4,750,000		

(The surplus of 1874 is here included, as the Liberals left office at the end of the financial year ; the surplus is therefore credited to them, and not to the following Tory Government.)

The chief features of the financial policy of the present Tory Government are :—

1. **Their doles to the landed interest and Denominationalism.**
2. **Their attack upon the sinking fund.**
3. **The enormous increase in the annual normal expenditure.**

They have devoted £1,800,000 a year under the Land Rating Acts to paying half the rates on agricultural land. They have given £105,000 a year to the clergy. They have given huge doles to the denominational schools.

They have made a raid upon the sinking fund. In 1875, Parliament set aside £28,000,000 a year, partly to meet the interest on the National Debt, partly to pay off the principal. In 1887, Mr. Goschen reduced this to £25,000,000, and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach reduced it in 1899—before the war—by another £2,000,000.

The normal expenditure in 1894-5 (the last complete Liberal year) was 94 millions. The estimated normal expenditure in 1903-4 is 140½ millions—*an increase in nine years of 46½ millions, or well over 5 millions a year.* Corn and sugar have been taxed, whilst the income-tax looks little likely for some time to fall below 1s. in the £. The main increase is on armaments, the Army and Navy that cost 34½ millions in 1894-5 costing 69 millions in 1903-4.

V.—IRELAND.

Ireland has always occupied a large share of the attention of Liberal Ministries, and the Liberal party always maintained that Ireland should be governed as far as possible in accordance with Irish ideas* : that Coercion was never a satisfactory remedy for Irish disorder, and could only touch the superficial symptoms of the disease, and that wherever coercive measures were adopted they should always be accompanied by measures of reform. Since the Reform Act of 1832, it has devoted itself to the problems of Irish tithes, Irish municipalities, the surplus funds of the Irish Church, the Irish famine, the Irish poor law, Irish education, the Irish Church, Irish land, and Irish popular government.

Even before the Reform Bill it carried out these same principles in fighting for Catholic Emancipation, which was essentially an Irish measure, and which was finally brought about through the election of O'Connell for County Clare.

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* See the remarks of Lord John Russell in 1834 : "I am not prepared to continue the government of Ireland without fully probing her condition. I am not prepared to propose Bills for coercion and the maintenance of a large force of military and police without endeavouring to improve, as far as lies in my power, the condition of the people."

And again in 1839 : "I know not why, if we conduct the government of England according to the wishes of the people of England, and if we conduct the government of Scotland according to the wishes of the people of Scotland, I know not why, in Ireland, the opinions and wishes of a small majority only should be consulted, and the great majority should be totally omitted in the list of the supporters of Government. I say, on the contrary, that we can have nothing firm, that we can have nothing stable, that we can have no permanent improvement, unless we act on such principles as shall carry with them the good will and the confidence of the Irish people.

After the Reform Act, it immediately set to work to redress Irish grievances. Its struggles with the Lords on the subject of Irish tithes, Irish Church funds, and Irish Municipalities have already been referred to. The result of these was that, owing to the action of the Lords, the Irish tenant was delayed several years in his liberation from the burden of the tithe, the Irish Church retained its surplus revenues for another generation, and the Irish towns received a much less liberal measure of municipal reform than was granted to England.

Ireland was again the subject which principally occupied the attention of Lord John Russell's Ministry of 1846-1852. He reorganised the Irish poor law, passed measures relieving the distress caused by the Irish famine, and facilitating emigration, extended the Irish franchise (a measure of which the scope was greatly narrowed by the House of Lords), and passed an Act to assist bankrupt landlords in selling their estates, so as to substitute solvent for insolvent proprietors.

The Irish measures of Mr. Gladstone's great Ministry of 1868-1874 have already been noticed. The disestablishment of the Irish Church removed one of the greatest grievances of the Irish people, and sensibly benefited even the Church itself. The Land Act of 1870 aimed at legalising the Ulster and other customs of "tenant right" and giving tenants compensation for the improvements they had executed on their farms.

The great Land Act of 1881 completed the reform of the Irish land laws. It gave every tenant a right to retain his farm as long as he paid his rent; it gave him power to sell his rights, if he desired to leave the farm, and more extensive compensation for his improvements; and enabled him to have a fair rent fixed by a Court of Law.

The Land Act of 1881 practically revolutionised the Irish land system. Ireland being almost purely an agricultural country (largely owing to the policy of the English Parliament which, in past generations, did its best to depress and destroy Irish industries), the competition for land was so keen that the landlords were enabled to exact scandalously unfair rents, which in bad seasons it was impossible for tenants to pay. Ireland is for the most part cultivated by small farmers working their own holdings. An eviction meant to the Irish farmer, in the words of Mr. Gladstone, "a sentence of death." Besides this, practically all the improvements on Irish farms are made by the tenant. When made they were appropriated by the landlord. If a tenant was evicted, or could not secure a renewal of his lease, he lost the value of all his improvements. The Land Act gave him fair rent, free sale, and fixity of tenure—besides compensation for improvements.

In 1885, a large section of the Conservative party did their best to exclude Ireland from the benefits of the Franchise Act, but Mr. Gladstone insisted on Ireland being included on the same terms as England.

The next year Mr. Gladstone publicly declared that the time had come to abandon the policy of treating Irish discontent by mixed measures of Coercion and Reform, and to grant the Irish demand for self government.

It is to the working of the Irish Land Act, and to the good feeling caused by the introduction of the Home Rule Bill, and the passing by the Tory Government of the Irish Local Government Act—a direct result of the Home Rule movement —that the great improvement in the state of Ireland in recent years is principally due.

VI.—LABOUR AND SOCIAL REFORM.

It is sometimes asserted by Conservatives (and the statement has recently been endorsed by Mr Chamberlain) that though they have practically nothing to show in the way of political and financial reform, theirs has been the party which has devoted itself to social and sanitary reform and measures promoting the safety, protection, and privileges of labour. It is difficult to understand on what basis this idea rests.

Factory Legislation.—As to laws regulating labour in factories, and protecting women and children from long hours and unhealthy conditions of work, these have never been party questions. They have been supported by some Liberals and some Tories, and opposed by some Liberals and some Tories, but there is no foundation for the assertion that the Liberal party, as a whole, has not had its full share in the work that has been accomplished.

The first important Factory Act was passed by the Liberal Government of 1833. This was followed by a series of others, the most important of which was the Ten Hours Act of 1847. It was introduced by Mr. Fielding, a Radical, and was supported and opposed indiscriminately from both sides of the House. It is true that the Conservatives in 1878 passed a very large Factory Act, but this was an Act which aimed chiefly at codifying and consolidating previous Acts already in force; of these Acts, thus consolidated, eleven were passed under Liberal Governments, and only five under Conservative Governments. Since 1878 there have been four important Factory Acts, two Liberal and two Conservative. The most important and far-reaching of these was Mr. Asquith's Act of 1895, which was a Liberal measure, though

it happened to pass into law under a Conservative Government.

In factory questions administration is as important as legislation, and the new spirit which Mr. Asquith infused into the administration of the Home Office, in particular his enquiries into dangerous and unhealthy trades, not only produced an immediate result in the Act of 1895, but make his tenure of the Home Office a landmark in the history of Factory Reform.

Mines Regulation Acts.—These, too, have never been party measures, as the following list will show:—

Act of 1842 — Conservative
" 1860 — Liberal
" 1862 — Liberal
" 1872 — Liberal
" 1887 — Conservative.

But the credit for this last measure really largely belongs to the Liberal Government of 1886 and to the Liberal party in the House of Commons in 1887. The Act of 1860 was peculiarly important, as it gave the miners one of their most valued privileges—the right of having a check-weigher at every pit, appointed and paid by themselves, to see that they received their proper wages.

Laws Legalising Trade Unions.—Infinitely the most important of these was the Trade Unions Act, 1871, which, until the recent Taff Vale decision, has been the great charter of trade unionism. It legalised the ordinary combinations of working men (which had hitherto been illegal as in "restraint of trade") and up to the time of the above decision gave in practice full protection to their funds (which had previously been at the mercy of dishonest officials). The share of the Conservative party in this class of legislation was an amendment of the Law of Conspiracy, passed in 1875, and

the Employers and Workmen Act, 1875. For these they are of course entitled to credit, as far as they go, but it must be remembered, as to the former, that it was partly necessitated by certain amendments introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Cairns (the Conservative Lord Chancellor) into a similar Liberal Act in 1871, and that, as to the second, its most important feature, the abolition of the imprisonment of workmen for breaches of contract with their employers, was due to an amendment moved by Mr. Mundella, a Liberal, and carried against the Government.

The Liberal party further can point to the following important measures introduced in the interests of labour.

1. *The Employers' Liability Act*, 1880, partially abolishing the doctrine of "common employment," and enabling workmen to obtain compensation for their injuries in the County-court.

2. *The Railways Regulation Act*, 1893, empowering the Board of Trade to regulate the hours of railway servants.

3. *Mr. Asquith's Employers' Liability Bill of* 1894, abolishing both the doctrine of "common employment" and "contracting out," and extending (amongst others) to seamen and agricultural labourers. This Bill had to be abandoned owing to amendments introduced by the House of Lords.

On the other side the Conservatives can show the Compensation Act of 1897, which already stands in need of wide amendment and extension, and which is far less comprehensive than Mr. Asquith's Bill of 1894.

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